

ADDRESS

OF

HENRY H. SIBLEY,

TO THE

PEOPLE OF MINNESOTA TERRITORY.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: The day being at hand which has been fixed by law for the choice of a Delegate to represent you in the next Congress, I have adopted this method of announcing myself to you as a candidate for re-election. It would have been much more agreeable to me if I had been permitted to do this in person, but it is not probable that I will be able to leave my post for a sufficient length of time to visit you before the first Monday in September, without jeopardizing the success of measures in which the Territory is deeply interested. No considerations merely personal to myself can induce me to be absent under such circumstances.

Nearly sixteen years have elapsed since I became a resident of what is now Minnesota. With the exception of the garrison at Fort Snelling, and a few settlers in the vicinity, and at the different trading posts in the interior, there was then not a single white man within the vast area of country embraced at present in the limits of our Territory. All was one vast solitude, beautiful indeed in its pristine loveliness, but without any traces of the handiwork of civilized man. In the course of time the influx of population commenced, and continued, but at a slow rate, until the admission of Wisconsin as a State, and the organization at the subsequent session of Minnesota Territory. The scene has changed, and that very suddenly, since the latter measure was secured. That organization has infused new energy and vitality into a region which had suffered for months from the withdrawal on the part of the General Government of the blessings and protection of law which had previously been enjoyed. Let us take a retrospective glance at the different movements which led the way to so momentous a result. The first of these was the Stillwater Convention, which assembled in

pursuance of a call made on the 4th day of August, 1848, by eighteen citizens, myself being one of that number. The Convention was composed of sixty-one delegates, representing nearly all the inhabited portions of the Territory, and their action in memorializing Congress, and in stimulating the public mind to the necessity of the immediate establishment of a Territorial Government, may be regarded as the moving spring of a series of measures, which were destined to bring about that desirable end. I was appointed by that Convention as a delegate or agent to visit Washington during the session of Congress, and use every proper effort to accomplish the object, which we all deemed to be of such paramount importance. I accepted the commission, stating to the Convention at the same time that I should accept of no remuneration from the people, either for loss of time, or for my personal expenses.

But a short period had elapsed, however, before acting-Governor Catlin, being satisfied of the propriety of the step by the letters of Hon. James Buchanan and others, and being urged by some of our citizens to do so, issued his proclamation for the election of a Delegate to Congress to represent the residuum of Wisconsin Territory. The proceedings of the Convention in my case were confirmed, and I was elected by the people. The obstacles which were thrown in the way of my obtaining a seat, and the desperate exertions necessary after I was admitted, to secure the passage by Congress of an act to establish the Territorial Government of Minnesota, are part and parcel of the history of the times, and must be familiar to most of you. Suffice it to say that those exertions, aided by friendly influences in and out of Congress, were successful, and Minnesota became an organized Territory of the Republic. The tidings of the passage of this act were received by the people with acclamation, and at the subsequent election I was returned as the Delegate to Congress without opposition. Such is a succinct but correct account of the transactions connected with our entrance upon a territorial state. The results are already visible in the flourishing condition of affairs among us, in the increase of immigration, and our prospective speedy advancement to the rank of an independent State of the Confederacy.

At the close of the session of Congress, and before my return to the Territory, I issued an address to my constituents, recapitulating what had been effected, and counselling them, so far as it was proper and respectful for me to do so, not to permit party politics to enter into their elections, but averring at the same time my determination to make public my own political sentiments so soon as I should become satisfied that it was the intention of the people to draw party lines. Subsequently, in the month of October, a Democratic Convention was held at St. Paul, a committee of which made a call upon me, which elicited, on my part, what has been designated as the American House Letter, about which so much has been said. I therein stated, that although I had previously opposed the mingling of party considerations with our elections, I was convinced that the lines were already virtually drawn, and in accordance, therefore, with my previous public declaration, I felt at liberty to make my own sentiments known, which were those of a Democrat of the Jeffersonian school, but I distinctly asserted at the same time, that, having been elected by the united votes of Whigs and Democrats, in no event would I depart from a course of strict neutrality in the discharge of my public duties here. No man can justly charge me with a deviation from that line of conduct, nor can I be induced to swerve from it during my remaining term of service.

It is evident I was in error in supposing that the people of the Territory generally were in favor of a party organization, and that such a step could no longer be avoided. And I am not prepared to say that the postponement of a division on political grounds is not the most prudent course that can be pursued, for the present at least, in our Territory. When our population shall have sufficiently increased to justify us in the belief that the day for the admission of Minnesota into the Union is not far distant, it will be the incumbent duty of every man within it so to endeavor to form its political complexion as to him may seem best calculated to ensure "the greatest good to the greatest number." Until that period arrives, leave your Delegate at least free to act, without being trammelled by any imposed obligation to take part in the political contests at the seat of Government. My own

experience has so far convinced me of the propriety of non-interference in these topics of discussion here, that should I even be elected by a strict party vote to that station, a conscientious regard for the interests of the Territory would constrain me to pursue the same line of policy which I have hitherto adopted. In no other way can a Delegate make himself useful to his constituents, or accomplish those beneficial results for the Territory, which they have a right to expect at his hands.

I need hardly inform you, fellow-citizens, that for obvious reasons there has been greater difficulty in procuring the assent of Congress to any measures of practical legislation during the present session, than has probably ever been the case since the foundation of the Government. Nearly eight months have been consumed in debate on topics more or less connected with the institution of slavery, to the exclusion of other great and important interests of the country. Every other subject of national concern has been overlooked and neglected by Congress, and up to this time there seems to be no more ground to hope for the adjustment or settlement of the sectional controversy which now agitates the land than at the commencement of the session. It could not reasonably be expected, under such circumstances, that Minnesota would receive much attention at the hands of that body. It should be a subject of congratulation, therefore, that we have not been thus neglected. Of the very few acts passed, and sanctioned by the President, three of them have been for our especial benefit. I refer to the bills for the erection of public buildings and a prison, for roads, and to authorize the Legislative Assembly to prolong its next session to ninety days. By the two former, we are secured the sum of eighty thousand dollars, to be expended during the current year. The sums allowed for the construction of roads between important and distant points in our Territory, although perhaps not sufficient to complete them, will go far towards opening the country to immigrants, and will prove of incalculable benefit, even on that score alone. And we may reasonably rely upon the liberality of Congress to supply any deficiency hereafter, which may operate to prevent the immediate completion of these great thoroughfares.

The estimates for the expenses of the Territorial Government for this year, including the increase requisite to meet the prolonged session, will amount to about thirty-five thousand dollars, and are provided for in the general civil and diplomatic appropriation bill, which will undoubtedly be passed within the next twenty days. To these amounts are to be added the sum appropriated to meet the deficiencies in the Territorial expenditures of last year, amounting to about thirteen thousand dollars, the most part of which was got through in the face of an existing law of Congress, prohibiting the Territories from exceeding the appropriations made to defray the expenses of their respective Governments. Thus far, then, we have secured to us for disbursement among our citizens during this year, more than one-eighth of a million of dollars in cash, which is more than any other Territory has ever received in a single year.

But this is not all that has been accomplished. The river and harbor bill, which has been reported to the House by the Committee on Commerce, contains an item of five thousand dollars for the survey of the Mississippi river above the Falls St. Anthony, preparatory to its improvement. Congress has enriched our Library, by the gift of a copy of the complete works of the Exploring Expedition, valued at eight hundred or a thousand dollars. The appropriations for treaties with the Sioux Indians, and to extinguish the Indian title to a considerable portion of the valley of the Red river of the North, have been placed in proper train, and will be speedily acted on. The Senate have passed the bill "for the benefit of Minnesota," which, should it succeed in the House, will grant us quite three millions of acres of the public lands for the construction of a railroad from our extreme western boundary, by the way of Lake Travers and the valley of the Minnesota river, to the Iowa line, with a sure prospect of a further grant at the next session, for a connecting branch to the seat of Government. The bill for the reduction of the military reserve at Fort Snelling, has been retarded in the Senate by opposition from the War Department and from other sources, but I have strong reasons to believe it will nevertheless become a law during the present session. The Half-Breed treaty, which has been to me the cause of much anxiety, and

in behalf of which I have spared no exertion, still remains unacted on in the Senate, and may possibly be defeated, because of the undue and malignant influences which have been brought to bear upon it from the Territory, inducing Senators to look upon it with a suspicious and unfavorable eye. The Bills for post-routes, and a collection district in Minnesota, will doubtless also be passed.

Beside these measures which I have enumerated, and which have required my unremitting attention, much business has been transacted with the different Departments of the Government, as well for the Territory as for private citizens. Mail facilities have been multiplied, and post offices established through my instrumentality. Several of the 36th sections of school land have been secured, of which the decision of the Commissioner of the Land Office would have deprived us, had I not prosecuted a successful appeal from that decision to the Secretary of the Interior. Many claims of our citizens upon the Government have been pressed, for the most part with success, and no individual can complain of neglect on my part, who has entrusted his affairs to my hands. I have, withal, maintained a correspondence with all parts of the country in reference to Minnesota and its advantages, information being naturally sought from me by persons desirous to emigrate, and cheerfully afforded.

I have thus endeavored to bring to your notice, fellow-citizens, but in an imperfect and hasty manner, the field of labor which has occupied your Delegate, for the most part, day and night, since the commencement of the session. You can thereby judge, to some extent at least, of the obstacles to be surmounted, in accomplishing what has been done. If any one imagines that these results have been brought about without personal solicitation, constant and unwearied, and the cultivation of kind relations with members of both houses of Congress and the heads of Departments and bureaus, as well as the most arduous continuity of exertion, he is much deceived in his estimate of what is necessary to the satisfactory consummation here, of business appertaining either to the Territory or to individuals. I have been a working man thus far through life, but never have I been called upon to undergo labor so incessant and so exhausting, as during this and the preceding session of Congress.

It will naturally be asked, why, if such be the case, I have any desire to return here as the Delegate, after the expiration of my present term of service. I have two reasons to assign, why I have consented again to go before the people as a candidate for re-election. The first is, that many of my friends, irrespective of party, have urged me to do so; and the second is my entire conviction, that one or more of those who have been announced as probable candidates for the station I now hold, seek to be elected, not for the advancement of the Territory and its interests, but to subserve private ends and selfish purposes. I have toiled too long and too faithfully for Minnesota, to be willing to see its destinies committed to such hands, if by any sacrifice of my own inclination or comfort, I can avert from it such an evil.

Being necessarily absent during the canvass, fellow-citizens, I must expect to be assailed by every device and every weapon which my enemies can bring to bear against me. Some of the gentlemen who are reported as among the candidates, will not, I feel assured, descend to detraction or abuse to endeavor to bring about my defeat. From others who are also announced as aspirants to the same office, I may not expect, nor do I ask forbearance. They commenced their system of tactics at the very beginning of the session, by endeavoring at that early period, to induce the people of Minnesota to believe that I had lost my influence here. I am willing to be judged on this point by results, which after all, is the only criterion whereby to form a correct impression as to the standing of a Representative. It will be charged, also, that I am connected with a firm, which is a monopoly. If to be a monopolist is never to make use of any means to crush an opponent, or to work injury to any man, then am I one. If it is in the nature of a monopolist to assist the poor man in securing his homestead, by lending the money necessary for him to do so, at never more than a legal rate of interest, when he would cheerfully have been paid twenty per cent. per annum, then must I plead guilty to the charge, for I have been such a monopolist in many cases, so far as my means would allow. I appeal to the old settlers who have known me for years, to say whether I have ever oppressed a human being, or taken advantage of his necessities to deal harshly by him.

I do not anticipate that the most virulent of my opponents will attempt any imputation upon my private character, or even insinuate that I have used my public position for personal objects of my own, or for any other purpose than the general interests of the Territory.

Fellow-citizens, if I have seemed unduly to parade before you the services I have rendered, I trust you will not attribute my having done so to an exaggerated estimate of my own merits, or a desire to impress you with an idea that what has been accomplished, has been owing *solely* to my own exertions. On the contrary, I have been aided by kind and confiding friends in and out of Congress, and it gives me pleasure here to acknowledge the obligations I am under to the Hon. Messrs. Douglass, Dodge, of Wisconsin, Dodge, of Iowa, Cooper, Underwood, Foote, Shields, Seward, Walker, and others, of the Senate, and to many gentlemen of both political parties in the House of Representatives, for the friendly assistance rendered me in promoting the interests of our Territory. His Excellency, Gov. Ramsey, has also rendered me essential support, by his correspondence with leading men here; and I am happy likewise to render to Hugh Tyler, Esq., of our Territory, the tribute due for his efficient co-operation in urging forward all measures of importance to its welfare. What I do claim for myself is, to have devoted my whole time and most strenuous efforts to the discharge of my public duty.

Finally, fellow-citizens, I offer myself as a candidate for your suffrages at the approaching election, without distinction of party, hereby pledging myself, if elected, to maintain during my term of service, the same neutral position in the discharge of my duties as a Delegate, that I have hitherto preserved, and to labor for the *general* good of Minnesota with the same zeal and diligence which have thus far characterized my course. More than this I can neither promise nor perform.

Your fellow-citizen,

HENRY H. SIBLEY.

WASHINGTON CITY, *July 29th*, 1850.